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ARCHÆOLOGICAL NOTES.

The Council of the Institute considered that archæological notes dealing with items of current interest and relating to Biblical history would be of value to members of the Institute. Accordingly they invited Sir Frederic Kenyon, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.Litt., LL.D., F.B.A., Sir Charles Marston, F.S.A., and Air Commodore Wiseman, C.B.E., to write these, the earliest period of Bible history—the Patriarchal and Iraq period being assigned to Air Commodore Wiseman, Palestinian archæology to Sir Charles Marston, the New Testament period and Greek manuscripts to Sir Frederic Kenyon.

IRAQ.

By AIR COMMODORE P. J. WISEMAN, C.B.E.

THE war has stopped excavations in Iraq; and the publication of the results of discoveries made before the war has been held up by difficulties regarding paper and printing. The compilation of archæological notes in these circumstances presents difficulties, as obviously there are no current excavations to which reference can be made.

There is however one place of Biblical interest, excavated before the war, about which little seems to be generally known in this country. Its attraction to Bible students is that it is the place to which the ten tribes were taken when they were deported from Samaria by Assyria. The Bible passage is:—

“Then the King of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the King of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes. (2 Kings, xvii, 5 and 6, and xviii, 10 and 11.)”

There has been a considerable amount of speculation as to the precise location of the district of Gozan and Halah to which the children of Israel were deported. Up to the beginning of this century the area of the headwaters of the Khabur was so dangerous for travellers, that apart from Beduin and Kurds, it was almost untrodden and unknown. Wandering robber bands occupied the neighbourhood. The district lay several days' journey to the South of the normal traveller's route from northern Syria to Mesopotamia,

which was by Urfa and Mardin and considerably north of the southern route from Damascus and Palmyra.

The main excavations at Tell Halaf (Halah) were made in the year 1927-1929 by Dr. Baron von Oppenheim, to whom, after the great war, the French authorities granted the permit to excavate in the headwaters of the Khabur.

This river is the only tributary of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia which has a permanent flow of water. In the region there are hundreds of springs; even in summer the Khabur is ninety feet broad, while in winter a great volume of water is poured into the Euphrates. This makes the district capable of great fertility. It was one of the oldest settlements in the area, and in ancient times was of great importance. Some of the pottery found was dated by the excavators at 3000 B.C. Many clay tablets written in cuneiform, and others in Aramaic were discovered; on several of these the name Guzana appears. It seems that Tell Halaf was the capital city of the Assyrian province of that name. Evidence of subsequent habitation by Greeks and Romans was traced.

While there was abundant evidence of its occupation as an Assyrian province, it is not at all surprising that the excavations revealed no trace of the presence of Israelite deportees. It is not likely that a people used as slaves or in a menial position would be mentioned on the monuments or inscriptions. What is of consequence is the precise location of what is probably the most important, and principal district to which they were deported. It must however be borne in mind that some were taken to the cities of the Medes, but as this is mentioned last, presumably the greater number were deported to the region of the Khabur. At one time it was imagined that Gozan was far more distant from Samaria than was Babylon from Jerusalem. This is not so. It is only about two-thirds the distance, that is 400 miles in the direct line. Moreover there was this difference, whereas between the Khabur and Samaria there was an almost continuous line of civilized cities, between Babylon and Jerusalem there was the great 500 mile stretch of desert, for the greater part almost waterless.

A cuneiform tablet was found at Tell Halaf dated in the year 793 B.C. explicitly calling the Assyrian Mannu-ki-assur "Governor of Guzana."

I well remember a discussion in the excavator's tent at Ur of the Chaldees when Mr. Gadd who was present told us of the recent discovery in the British Museum of a tablet which told of the fall of Nineveh. In 612 the Capital of the Assyrian empire was stormed by the Medes, and not long after the district to which the Israelites had been deported was taken.

I do not comment on any of the theories regarding the movements of the Israelites before or after that fall.